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Washington, D.C.

Black Beret to Be Standard Headgear

ARMY Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki has announced that black berets, now worn by rangers, will become the Army's standard headgear beginning next June.

"It is time for the entire Army to accept the challenge of excellence that has so long been a hallmark of our special operations and airborne units," Shinseki said. Adopting the berets will be "another step toward achieving the capabilities of the objective force" of Army transformation, he said.

Shinseki made the announcement during the annual meeting of the Association of the United States Army in October.

The BDU cap will still be used in the field, even after the Army adopts the black beret for garrison wear as part of its ongoing transformation, SMA Jack L. Tilley said after the announcement.

"The saucer cap and garrison cap could go away," Tilley said, "But those are things we've got to work out."

Soldiers will begin wearing the beret on June 14, "the first Army birthday of the new millennium," Shinseki said.

All soldiers, regardless of rank or branch, will wear the beret if they meet the Army standard, Shinseki said. He added that Tilley would develop the plan to establish the standard and implement the headgear change.

"Putting that beret on will become part of a soldier's rite of passage," Tilley said.

Shinseki said special operations and airborne soldiers will continue to wear their distinctive berets. Soldiers in airborne units wear maroon berets and special forces soldiers wear green berets.

Soldiers in ranger units now wear black berets while in their dress uniforms and also when in garrison wearing the Battle Dress Uniform. They wear the BDU soft cap or Kevlar helmet in the field.

"The black beret has a lot of tradition," said MAJ Gary Kolb, a spokesman for the Army's Special Operations Command. "It's something the rangers wear with pride. They hold it in high esteem."

Kolb said Spec. Ops. Cmd. supports Shinseki's decision to share the black berets with the rest of the Army. He said rangers are anxious to see how the policy will be implemented. — *Army News Service*

Transformation

IAV Contract Awarded

THE Army took another step into its Transformation Initiative when it announced that GM GDLS Defense Group had been awarded the contract to supply the Army with the Interim Armored Vehicle.

The \$4 billion, six-year contract will provide the Interim Brigade Combat Team with two vehicle variants that are deployable anywhere in the world in combat-ready configurations.

The IAV, which is a wheeled Light Armored Vehicle III, is powered by the same engine as the FMTV, said LTG Paul Kern, director of the Army Acquisition Corps and military deputy to the assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition, logistics and technology. This will allow the use of the same support structure for all of a unit's vehicles, including mechanics and parts.

"This is a brand-new vehicle for the Army and puts us on the course to change the organization and culture of the Army for the 21st century," Kern said.

The two variations of the LAV III that will be produced for the Interim Armored Vehicle program are the Infantry Carrier Vehicle and the Mobile Gun System. The ICV will have eight configurations besides the basic infantry carrier model — mortar carrier, reconnaissance vehicle, anti-tank guided missile vehicle, fire-support vehicle, engineer support vehicle, command-and-control vehicle, medical-evacuation vehicle and the NBC reconnaissance vehicle.

The IAVs are not a replacement for the M1 Abrams tank or the M3 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle, Kern said. The IAVs will be used in places, such as urban areas, where the heavy armored vehicles are not suitable for the mission.

GM GDLS is a joint venture between General Motors, Electro-Motive Division, and General Dynamics Land Systems Division and is based in Sterling Heights, Mich. The majority of the work on the project will be done in the United States and Canada. — *OASD (PA)*

Aberdeen Prvg. Gmd., Md.

Computers Ease Personnel Actions

IMPROVING services for federal employees remains a top Department of Army priority.

Since regionalization began in 1994, the Army has made drastic changes in the way it performs its duties. The principal vehicle of these changes is a more sophisticated, enhanced and complex computer network.

Department of Defense human-resource workers will play an important role as they start deploying a new automated data system, the "Modern System," at personnel centers throughout the world.

The DOD-wide Defense Ci-

vilian Personnel Defense System (DCPDS) will launch an automated human-resources system that will link all military branches under the same personnel system. DOD officials said the database will support about 800,000 records.

"The modern DCPDS will support regionalized personnel services by allowing direct access to up-to-date information," said Denise Copeland, a personnel management specialist at the Civilian Personnel Operations Center Management Agency here.

"One of the advantages of the system is that everyone involved in the civilian personnel process — managers, supervisors, resource managers and human-resource personnel —

can access the system, and data will flow quickly and efficiently to organizations and geographic locations," she said.

The Civilian Personnel Operations Centers' staffs will be the most frequent users, as they are the ones who process personnel actions, which will be recorded electronically. This will allow managers and human-resources officers to track personnel activities from their desktop computers.

The Southwest Region, based at Fort Riley, Kan., began using the new system Oct. 13. The North Central Region at Rock Island, Ill., was to begin using the system Nov. 24. Army personnel officials hope to begin using the system in other regions during 2001.

For more information visit website at <http://cpol.army.mil>, under "Modernization." Current information on policy and procedural changes also is posted on the website. — *CPOCMA Public Affairs Office*

Washington

Common Access Cards Issued

OVER the next several years DOD expects "smart cards" to replace the identification cards of all active duty military members, Selected Reserve personnel, DOD civilian employees and eligible contractors. DOD began issuing the cards in October, Pentagon officials said.

Personnel at the Pentagon and Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., will be among the first to receive the card, which will eventually allow access to secure areas, permit entry into DOD computer networks and serve as the authentication token for DOD's computerized public key infrastructure.

The "common-access

cards" feature barcoding, a magnetic strip and, for the first time, an embedded integrated circuit chip, said Bernard Rostker, under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

"We'll use the card for access to buildings and computer systems, and it can facilitate electronic commerce, allowances, mess hall access and the like," he said. As new applications come on line, he added, DOD will have the wherewithal to allow its personnel to gain access to the various systems.

The deployment of the card moves DOD closer to a significant security milestone, said Paul Brubaker, deputy chief information officer in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence.

"The smart card will give us the capability to digitally sign documents, transactions, orders and a lot of other implements we use to do business," he said. The cards also give DOD the capability to encrypt and thus privately exchange sensitive information over open networks.

Initially, the cards will contain identification and security information. Later versions will also hold such service member information as inoculations, medical and dental records, finance allotments and other data.

DOD does not plan to convert the ID cards of family members, retirees, members of the Inactive Guard and Inactive Ready Reserve or disabled veterans, because no requirement has been identified to justify the expense, DOD officials said.

Each credit-card size card costs about \$8.

For more information on the common-access card visit www.dmdc.osd.mil/smartcard. — *American Forces Press Service*

Pay Issues

Pay Increases With Health-premium Conversion

MANY Army civilian employees saw an increase in their take-home pay in October as health-insurance premiums were paid for the first time with pretax dollars.

The increase is a result of the Federal Employees Health Benefits premium conversion program. In the past, agencies deducted health premiums after federal income taxes were paid. Beginning with the first full pay period in October, premium allotments will now be taken out before taxes and will not be subject to income tax, Medicare or Social Security taxes, so less tax will be withheld and paychecks will be larger.

The average increase in pay will be about \$434 per year, or \$16.69 for a two-week pay period, depending on the cost of individual plans and the employee's tax bracket, according to Office of Personnel Management officials.

However, the increase may be short-lived, an OPM official said, as the cost of health insurance is expected to increase significantly in January.

In fact, the FEHB premium conversion program was devised as part of a "balancing act" to help offset the rising cost of health benefits, according to OPM Director Janice R. Lachance.

In the coming year, premiums for health maintenance organizations will increase an average of 8.5 percent, while fee-for-service plans will see an average increase of 10.9 percent, OPM officials said. — *ARNEWS*

Washington

Caldera Opens Simulation Institute

THEY may not be as sophisticated as the holodeck suites depicted in "Star Trek," but future Army simulators will bring new meaning to the word "realism" in the high-tech world of virtual reality.

"This is about injecting more realism into Army training, because it is an old and proven Army axiom that realistic training saves lives," Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera said at the opening of the Army's new simulator research center, the Institute for Creative Technologies, in Marina del Rey, Calif.

"Simulators allow you to safely turn up the heat without the danger of training injuries or other accidents," he said. "Right now, flight simulators allow pilots to get more experience reacting to threats, firing simulated weapons and flying

nap of the earth than they get with 100 hours of actual flying."

However, Caldera continued, simulators are not intended to totally replace hands-on training using the equipment soldiers use to execute their real-world missions. "If you have honed your skills on a simulator, you are better prepared when you actually train on the real thing," he said.

Under a \$45 million, five-year contract, the University of Southern California has been challenged to seek additional partners in the film and video-game industries in developing immersive-learning simulator technology. Paramount Pictures and SONY Electronics are among those that have already signed on.

Chief among concepts at the institute was the Mission Rehearsal Exercise System. The MRES uses interactive computer-driven scenarios to allow soldiers to experience the sights, sounds and circum-

stances they are likely to encounter when deploying to a new area of operations.

"We are immersing soldiers in an intense 3D audio and graphics environment, facing tense situations requiring immediate decisions," said Dr. William Swartout, ICT's technical director. "Different decisions at critical points determine different outcomes. Participants interact with a variety of artificial intelligence characters representing local inhabitants, friendlies, hostiles and coaches."

The program is not totally scripted, as are most current video games. It is situation-based, which is dependent on different choice points. The AI characters react based upon behavior and emotion modeling at those choice points.

Swartout said a production version will probably not be available for another few years.

"One of the big issues we are attempting to address is that it often takes six months to develop software for a crisis which is usually over by the time the program's ready," Swartout said. "We want to build a large library of environments from around the world into which we can import AI characters from other scenarios." — ARNEWS

Washington

New Retiree Dental Plan

MILITARY retirees asked for a more comprehensive dental plan, and now they have one. The enhanced TRICARE Retiree Dental Program, which

Travel News

New Travel System Debuts

OFFICIAL travel for Department of Defense service members and civilians is getting better. The Defense Travel System began a "real-time" operational assessment of its service using actual travelers Oct. 16 at Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo.

Operational testing is in its final phase this month.

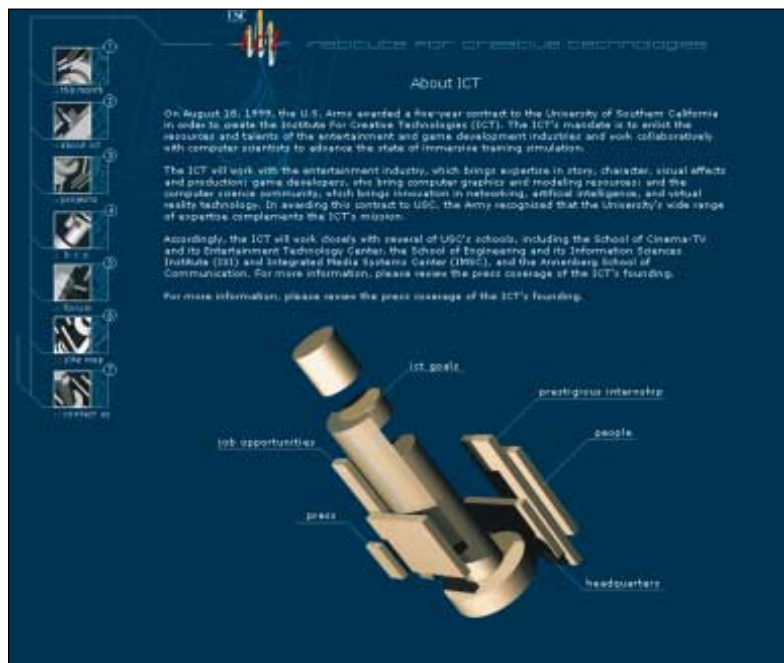
The Defense Travel System is a state-of-the-art, fully automated travel process that travelers can complete from their desktop computers. The system eliminates the labor-intensive process for handling travel arrangements, requesting orders, booking tickets and filing voucher claims.

"Not only will the process be easier for the traveler but the government will save time and money," said COL Pamela Arias, program director.

Once travelers are accustomed to the system, she predicts, memories of processing paper vouchers will seem like a "Model T."

As the Defense Travel System takes shape, the Project Management Office and Thompson-Ramo-Wooldridge, the system's prime vendor, will provide frequent updates on the program's progress.

For additional information, travelers can access the travel system's website at www.dtic.military/travelink. — Defense Travel System



ICT will help soldiers practice their military skills for a variety of operations using the latest high-tech computer simulations.

went into effect Oct. 1, adds more than 100 new procedures and extends eligibility criteria, said Navy Capt. Lawrence McKinley, TRICARE senior consultant for dentistry.

The new program supersedes one started in February 1998 that augmented "space-available" retiree dental care at military hospitals and clinics.

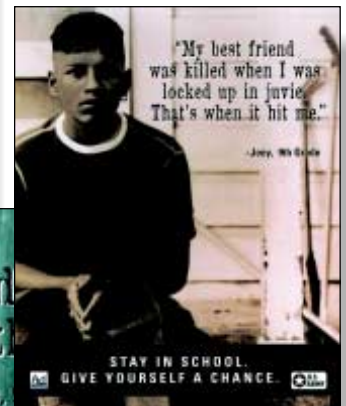
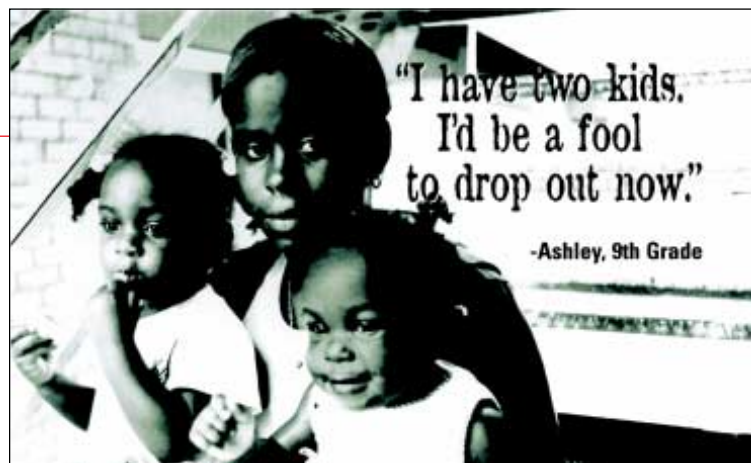
Eligible beneficiaries include retirees from active duty; Reserve members entitled to retired pay but under age 60; spouses of retirees; retirees' children who are under age 21 or full-time students under age 23; surviving spouses who have not remarried; and eligible children of deceased members who died while on active duty for more than 30 days when the children aren't eligible for the TRICARE Dental Program.

The enhanced dental program also offers expanded eligibility, McKinley said.

Members can now enroll a spouse or child without enrolling themselves, provided they have documented proof that they are:

- Eligible to receive dental care from the Department of Veterans Affairs;
- Enrolled in an employers' dental plan that isn't available to family members; and
- Unable to obtain benefits from the TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan due to a current and enduring medical or dental condition.

McKinley said the 114 new procedures make the enhanced TRICARE plan "a very comprehensive dental program." New services include crowns and bridges; full and partial dentures;



orthodontics; and allowance for composite-resin fillings in the back teeth, a second annual cleaning, and dental accident coverage for traumatic injury.

The new services come at a price. Beneficiaries will pay about double for the enhanced coverage under the new dental plan, McKinley said. Monthly premiums, dependent upon geographic region, range from \$21 to \$34 for one person; \$40 to \$65 for two; and \$62 to \$105 for a family of three or more.

The rates are good until Jan. 31, 2003, when new contract bids are scheduled.

Enrollment in the new program began in September. McKinley said enrollment in the basic dental program ceased Aug. 31. Basic program beneficiaries, he said, may continue coverage under the old program with no change in terms or upgrade to the enhanced program.

To determine eligibility for the enhanced TRICARE Retiree Dental Program, or monthly premium rates per region, call Enrollment Services toll-free at (888) 838-8737. Visit the TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan

website at www.ddpdelta.org for more information. — AFPS

Washington

"Operation Graduation" Targets Youths

THE Army has launched a three-year public-service ad campaign encouraging American youths to stay in school, said Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera.

Dubbed "Operation Graduation," the campaign features at-risk teens who had dropped out of school and have since completed high school.

Radio and television commercials with the youngsters telling their stories will begin airing soon. Their photos and the slogan "Stay In School. Give Yourself a Chance," will also appear on billboards, and on the Internet via banners. The message is targeted on the half a million students who drop out of school each year.

"The Army is sponsoring these messages because we believe in America's youths, and we believe that the Army is an

The "Operation Graduation" message will appear on TV, radio, the Internet, and in print and billboard ads.

organization that can effectively deliver this message," Caldera said.

"We are one of the largest employers of young people in America, and so of course we care about their education, their training, and their moral and physical development. Most of these young people will probably never join the Army or any of the armed forces, but we still think we have a lot to offer by helping to sponsor this campaign."

Army sponsorship includes \$1.5 to 2 million a year to cover in-house production and distribution costs, and, according to Ad Council president and chief executive officer Peggy Conlon, it provided the creative spark which ignited the drive for the campaign.

Operation Graduation TV spots are posted on the secretary of the Army home page and may be viewed via streaming video at www.hqda.army.mil/secarmy/. — ARNEWS